

AS THEY GROW UP, CHILDREN CHANGE FROM “YUMMY” TO THAT “MAKES US FAT”

Once a child reaches the age of 10, nutritional standards compete with culinary or hedonic benchmarks (the latter being linked to pleasure). This could be a result of public health policies and nutritional education programs.

Researchers in the CSGA have determined which are the dominant attitudes (hedonic or rational) to food in 194 children aged 5 to 11, with the help of a game called MIAM. This game is comprised of two tests:

- An implicit association test, which consists of presenting groups of 3 foods. For each trio, the child has to choose the two foods that "match" according to him or her.
- An explicit categorization test. The child has to class the foods into one of the following four categories: "yummy", "yuck", "it makes you strong", "it makes you fat". The two first categories refer to hedonic values, whereas the last two reflect nutritional values.



The results demonstrate an interesting dissociation. When the child is questioned implicitly, he makes "culinary" associations (e.g. pasta-steak) in 81% of cases, to the detriment of nutritional associations (e.g. pasta-rice). This dominance of the culinary attitude is seen irrespective of the child's age, reflecting cultural learning where pleasure is fundamental. However, when the child is questioned explicitly about the pleasure or health value of the foods, an increase in the number of nutritional categorization is seen with age, to the detriment of hedonic categories. By the age of 10, half of the categorizations are made up of nutritional criteria rather than hedonic ones. These results signify the emergence of cognitive attitudes in the child, which become more and more rational as his development evolves, and which are influenced by social norms.

Finally, in contrast to the idea that overweight children would be extremely sensitive to the hedonic component of foods, the association test does not show a link between implicit attitudes and the weight of children. On the other hand, in the explicit categorization test, overweight children make more nutritional categorizations than normal weight children do. These children probably have an increased desire to conform to social or familial expectations.

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To know more

Monnery-Patris S, Marty L, Bayer F, Nicklaus S, Chamberon S (2016). Explicit and implicit tasks for assessing hedonic-versus nutrition-based attitudes towards food in French children. *Appetite*, 96, 580-587.

<http://www.cerim.org/actualite-scientifique/tres-jeunes-les-enfants-passent-du-miam-au-ca-fait-grossir.html>

Key words

Child ; obesity; overweight; food pleasure; nutrition; attitudes; development.